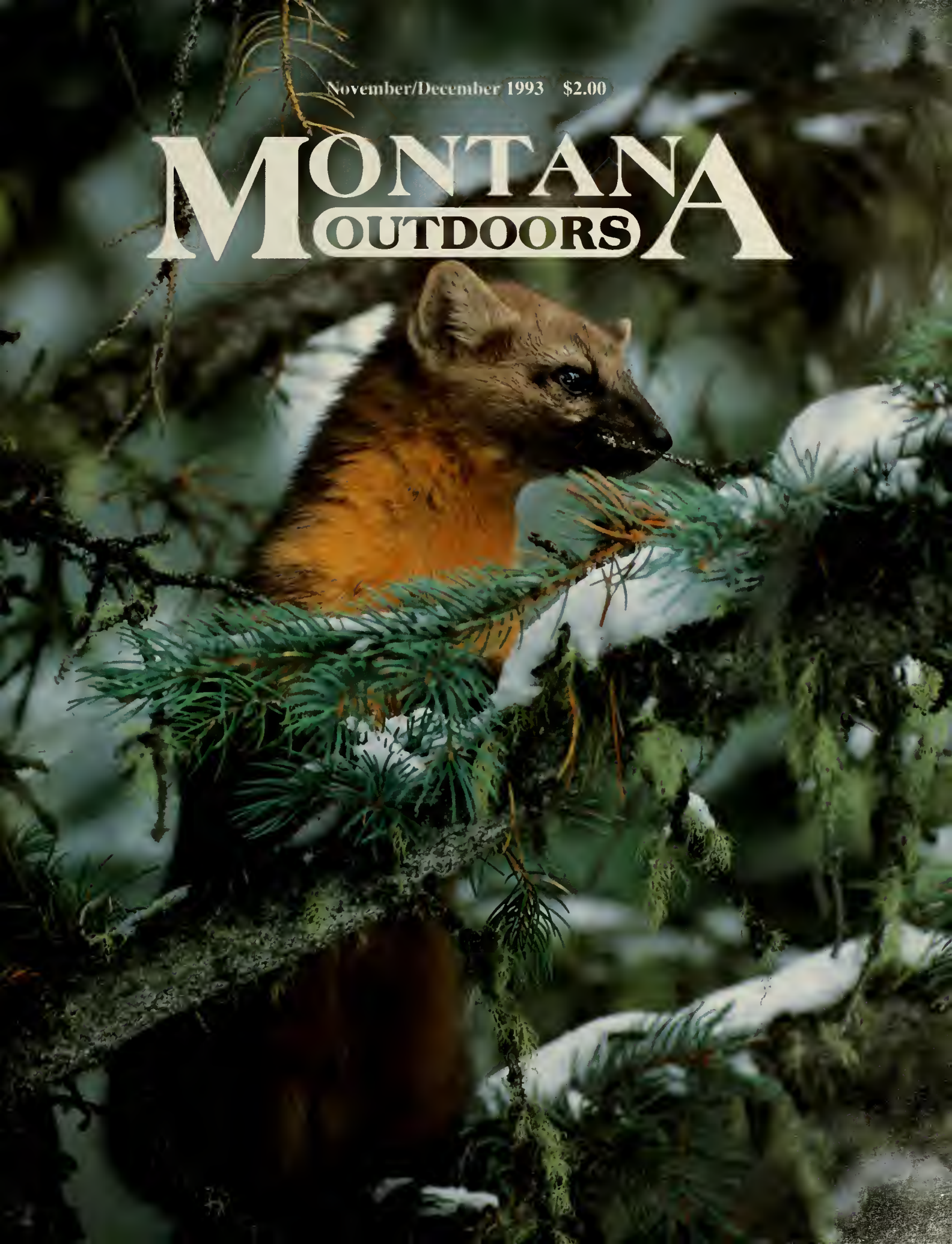
November/December 1993 $2.00

MONTANA OUTDOORS



Our Point of View

MICHAEL J. BARLOW

It has been nearly a year since Montana's citizen legislators gathered in Helena for their 53rd session to debate matters close to the hearts and, at times, pocketbooks of their fellow Montanans.

They are loggers and lawyers, educators and ranchers; they hail from towns like Hungry Horse, Lodge Grass, Fishtail, Floweree, and Trout Creek.

They are as diverse as Montana is wide, and as dedicated to their work as Montana is tall. And, in 90 days every two years or so, they attempt to settle many of the affairs of state.

Those who draw the short straws end up on the fish and game committees. At least that's what some have told me. Maybe it's because there is no such thing as a simple fish and game bill. Or that nearly all Montanans fancy themselves as experts on such subjects. Least ways, arguing fish and game bills becomes a form of recreation in itself.

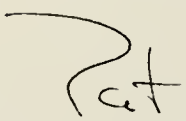
Yet, not much could have prepared them for what they would face last session. They heard about too little hunting access, too much land acquisition, commercialization of wildlife, big game damage to agriculture, an unsettled outfitting industry, and more.

Old problems, new problems; old solutions, new...well, not yet.

In his article beginning on page 32, Representative Chase Hibbard speaks to the problems and a new process to bring people together to address those problems. We can dream about the possibilities.

Author Horace Walpole wrote, "Imagination was given to man to compensate him for what he is not. A sense of humor was provided to console him for what he is."

I suspect it will take a good dose of both if we are to realize the possibilities of new solutions.



Patrick J. Graham
Director
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DAN & CINDY HARTMAN

With its foxlike face, erect ears, and shiny black eyes, the marten is a picture of alertness and curiosity (page 27).

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Elaine Allestad
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COVERS

"Fox of the Treetops" would be an appropriate title for our front cover photo of a pine marten, contributed by **Dan and Cindy Hartman** of Silver Gate. It's also the title of an article on martens (page 27) featuring more of the Hartmans' stunning photography. **Steve Dahmer's** back cover shot of a successful deer hunter serves as a reminder that big game seasons are in progress—a time to get out and enjoy the richness of the Montana autumn.

The Ducks of Winter

A late-season hunt provides mallards, misses, and memories.

by Bernie Kuntz
photos by Dave Books

"I'VE SHOT PLENTY of ducks in my day," Old Jake says as we sit before the fire at my home in Bozeman. "I'll just go along and watch you and Laurie and the ducks. And Bruno."

"Suit yourself, but you might regret not having the waterfowl stamps," I say. "There are lots of mallards along the river this time of year. Last day of the season tomorrow, and there won't be anywhere to buy stamps."

The waterfowl stamps were to be his birthday gift from me, but I could tell my 75-year-old father didn't quite believe me about duck hunting in January. Dad was born and raised in North Dakota. Except for 4-1/2 years with the U.S. Army during World War II where he served in Italy, Sicily, France, and North Africa, he spent his entire life in North Dakota, just like his mother before him who lived 93 years in the same county. In Montana

they tell jokes about North Dakota and the people who live there, and even though I left that state almost 20 years ago, I still hear the jokes. But North Dakota waterfowl hunting is nothing to joke about. The duck factory, it's been called, and we lived right in the middle of it. "Ducks till hell wouldn't have them," we liked to say. Ducks until my mother refused to help pick any more. Ducks until our non-hunting Armenian friends would say politely, "Oh, tanks but vee got plenty ducks now."

But in North Dakota the season is very short—an early October opener, and by the time deer season opens five weeks later the sloughs are frozen and the ducks have gone south. You would no sooner hunt mallards in January in North Dakota than you would try to launch a boat.

My father didn't appreciate the fact that many Montana waterways remain open throughout the fall, and well into winter, and we have splendid waterfowl hunting after all the other hunting seasons are closed.

My father didn't appreciate the fact that many Montana waterways remain open throughout the fall, and well into winter, and we have splendid waterfowl hunting after all the other hunting seasons are closed.

There certainly are some advantages to hunting late, too. My wife Laurie and I were hiding along the Madison River on opening day last October when a couple of college students drove up, parked their pickup in the fishing access lot, and walked downriver a half-mile. From there they proceeded to shoot at every bird that flew within 200 yards of them. I waited by their pickup for almost an hour to give them what we called in the Marine Corps "a royal chewing-out" (actually, we used a different term) but they never did show up, so we picked up our lone teal, called Bruno into the Suburban, and went home.

I didn't hunt ducks again until late December, and then I didn't see a single hunter outside of my own party. You won't find a lot of hunters out in December or January because of the cold weather. Most "normal" people are sitting at home, or they are skiing, or returning Christmas gifts. In any case, hunting isn't on their minds.

Also, landowners are not besieged by hunters at this time of year, so they are more likely to allow you to hunt on their land. Most landowners I have met would just as soon eat a boiled owl as a mallard duck or a goose, so they don't mind if you shoot some. In fact, some landowners have regarded me with amusement, that I would even bother to shoot and pick "some darned ol' ducks."

Yet, the Canada honkers are often stacked up this time of year on the Yellowstone, the Missouri, the Madison, and a dozen other rivers in this fortunate state. And mallards! It reminds me of those golden Dakota autumns 30 years ago and more. I have seen flocks of mallards numbering between 1,000 and 3,000 birds in December and January in Montana.

Despite good hunting opportunities, the number of waterfowl hunters in Montana has declined over the past 15 years. Jeff Herbert, statewide waterfowl biologist for FW&P, says that waterfowl hunter numbers decreased from a high of about 27,000 in the late 1970s to about 16,000 in 1981. This precipitous drop was directly related to the endrin (pesticide) contamination issue that surfaced that year. As this issue abated and endrin was removed from the market, waterfowl hunter numbers again increased to about 19,000 by 1987. But participation dropped sharply again in 1988 in response to low continental duck populations, restrictive duck hunting regulations, and the statewide conversion to non-toxic shot. Since that time, the number of waterfowlers has climbed back to about 16,000. This general decline has been documented throughout the flyways. The fact is, says Herbert, "Recruitment of young people into waterfowling has tapered off in this era of video games, single-parent families, and expanding urban populations."

Management agencies—the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FW&P) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—need the revenue generated by waterfowl hunters' purchases of federal and state waterfowl stamps to fund habitat development projects in Montana and other parts of the country. Herbert emphasizes that waterfowlers who shoot three mallard drakes, or a pair of drakes and a hen, are not damaging waterfowl populations. "We need the waterfowl hunter," he says. "Our habitat projects depend to a large extent on that $5 Montana waterfowl stamp, and it's mostly hunters who buy them. The solution to low duck numbers is improved habitat, especially on the breeding grounds. Our work in Montana has been cost-effective and extremely productive in terms of ducks and other wildlife produced."

AND SO I HUNT late-season mallards with a clear conscience, and my hunting spots come and go, like the ranch south of Hardin where the pheasant and sharptail hunting was so good I was planning to have my ashes scattered there one day. Someone leased the place, and I haven't been able to hunt there in four seasons.

Fate smiled on me, though, when I met a man named John in Ennis a couple years ago (his last name will have to go unpublished). For the past two seasons he has allowed my wife and me to hunt on his property near the Madison River. It's a lovely spot, one that I treasure and protect. It is where we will be hunting on this cold January morning.

We drive the old Suburban off the rim, following the rocky two-track road, and park the vehicle a half-mile from the willows and beaver ponds. Bruno, my

Labrador, makes moaning, gurgling sounds in his throat from the rear of the Suburban. He knows it is hunting time, and he wants to be part of it.

"These willows are usually loaded with mallards," I explain to Dad and Laurie. "They'll flush when we approach, but then we'll set up our decoys and wait for the small flocks to drift back. Stay hidden and I'll use the duck call. Laurie, you've got the first shot."

And so in the twilight of early morning, we walk through the snow toward the ponds, Laurie carrying her Remington Model 1100 16-gauge with the full-choke barrel, and me with a seabag of duck decoys and the old Winchester Model 50 full-choke 12-gauge that Dad bought brand-new in 1961 and gave to me a few years ago.

After three large flocks of mallards noisily erupt from the spring creeks and beaver ponds, Laurie sets out my dozen mallard decoys. When Dad sees me giving her instructions as to their placement, he says, "If Laurie's folks saw this, they'd wonder what the heck is going on here—Laurie wading around in the beaver pond setting out duck decoys while her husband directs things like an Arab sultan."

"She has the only waders that don't leak," I explain.

It isn't long before the first flock of mallards circles to the north, and when they hear my feeding chuckle they swoop in, tipping this way and that, down, down, closer, closer, as if they are suspended from invisible wires. Laurie swings and fires, misses, fires again and drops a greenhead in the middle of the pond.

"Fetch, Bruno!" The big Lab, trembling with excitement, barrels his way into the icy water, scoops up the mallard, and swims back.

"Good dog, Bruno."

He no sooner shakes cold spray all over us than another flock approaches. This time I bag a greenhead with a load of steel No. 3's, miss my second shot, then knock down a second drake. Bruno retrieves the birds, and the four of us huddle in the willows, an old wool Army blanket tossed over the wet Labrador, watching as flocks of Canada geese fly up the Madison River. A couple of times geese approach us, but never close enough for a shot.

Mallards funnel into many Montana waterways in late fall and early winter, providing spectacular waterfowl hunting.

"I can't find the heads to my homemade goose decoys," I say. "Dragged them with me over 5,000 miles of moving, and now when I want to use them, I can only find the decoy bodies in the garage. I hope to buy some good ones next year."

As we sit and watch the honkers and listen to their wild cries, it reminds me of another time Laurie, Dad, and I hunted together. It was during a 1985 brown bear hunt in Tenakee Inlet on Chichagof Island in southeast Alaska. That time we watched through a rain-streaked cabin window in Tenakee Springs as the orcas, or killer whales, swam up the Inlet during eight straight days of horrendously bad weather...weather as only southeast Alaska can manufacture it. I still remember Dad excitedly pointing out the whales to us, the first he had ever seen.

SUDDENLY DUCKS are flying again, and Laurie and I take turns shooting.

"If I had known this, I'd have taken the waterfowl stamps," Dad whispers from his hiding place among the willow clumps. He is grinning and his eyes are bright. "It's fun to watch them come in though—they're so close!"

"You'll have to wait for next year."

"That's okay. There! Some more mallards coming in!"

The ducks are still flying after we drop the sixth bird, and Dad scolds me for putting the full-choke barrel on Laurie's shotgun.

"Yeah, we both should have brought improved cylinder barrels for this trip," I admit. "But last time we were out here we hunted a different spot and the shots were much longer—the full choke worked fine."

"He makes her put out the decoys, then he puts the wrong barrel on the gun...he's trying to make you miss, Laurie."

"I know it, Jake. Don't give him any mercy."

Just like old times, we hunt and josh one another, tease and exaggerate. I carry the big bag of decoys, four of the six mallards, and the Model 50 through the snow while Bruno romps and plays and marks bushes until I puzzle at his bladder capacity.

We walk through the clean snow, the mallards and geese still flying, the cold blue light of the January sun coming from over the Gravelly Mountains, boots creaking in the dry snow, each of us thinking our own thoughts, and me wishing it were not the last day of the season. ■

Of Winter, Windswept Landscapes, and Rough-Legged HAWKS

by DEBORAH RICHIE and JOHN MCNEAL

SUSPENDED IN the 50-below-zero air, the bird seems to sweep the ice crystals away with each beat of its dark, broad wings. The rough-legged hawk then veers to the prairie, crushing the deer mouse in its talons. For those who winter in Montana's Big Hole Valley, life and death intertwine each day.

More than 5,000 rough-legged hawks in loose groups soar down from the Arctic tundra into Montana each October. From the moment red-tailed hawks head south, rough-legs reign over Montana prairies and marshes. We wake up one morning and all has changed. Hunkering on fence posts or telephone poles, they are sentinels of the cold. By the time the first songbirds return in March, most of these hawks have vanished.

Globally, rough-legs harken from the windswept, far northern reaches of North America and Eurasia. Their winter journey takes them to places we would not consider a haven from bitter temperatures. Montana and Idaho lead all other states in highest numbers of rough-legs observed in annual Christmas bird counts.

Watching a rough-legged hawk flap, hover, pounce, perch, or spiral upwards connects us to the top of the continent. To follow the flight of this magnificent bird of prey is to feel the Arctic wrapping itself around Montana like an icy cloak. To know the rough-leg is to realize, too, that life in a frozen landscape miraculously persists, from voles and mice tunneling in the grasses to a thumb-sized shrew attacking a winter insect.

The force that drives the hawks south is not the cold. The disappearance of lemmings beneath protective snow sends a clear signal. In the wind-scoured and snow-free Montana plains, they will discover comparable fare in voles and deer mice.

The rough-leg joins three other "buteo" (broad-winged) hawks that reside at least part of the year in Montana: the red-tailed, ferruginous, and Swainson's hawks. These three soar south of the Montana border each winter. The Swainson's hawk flies all the way to Argentina.

The feathery legs that lend the rough-legged hawk its common name also find their way into the bird's Latin name, Buteo *lagopus*. The genus name, *Buteo*, translates as "broad-winged," while the species, *lagopus*, means literally "hare's foot."

All buteo hawks share certain common characteristics, particularly broad, rounded wings and tails, and a soaring lifestyle suited to open country. Beyond that, each species has its own style of hunting, its favorite prey, its preferred nesting and wintering sites. The rough-leg's tail and wings are longer than those of most other buteos. When observing this hawk in flight, you are most likely to notice the flash of white rump and a white tail framed by a black band at the tip.

What clearly distinguishes this hawk from its companion buteos is an ability to hover, a hunting technique shared by kestrels, ospreys, and kingfishers. Surveying the landscape from one place by flying into the wind makes sense for a bird whose home bears few trees or other perches.

ALAN G NELSON

ALAN G. NELSON

The acute vision shared by all hawks accentuates life on a land that to us may appear barren. One December, I tromped across the frozen marshes of Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge in search of a stray visitor from the Arctic, a gyrfalcon. From the road, all appeared lifeless. Once I entered the marsh, voles flew out from under my Sorel boots. It was disconcerting, all these furry beasts scurrying from grass clump to grass clump.

The feet of rough-legs are much smaller and weaker than those of red-tails and other buteos, making the french-roll-sized voles just about right for a pounce. Voles and lemmings share similar characteristics: pudgy bodies; beady eyes; short ears, legs, and tails; and a preference for the open, grassy life. Voles remain active in winter, whereas the larger ground squirrels hibernate in burrows. The reappearance of ground squirrels in spring coincides with the return of red-tailed hawks. It seems likely that the ability of red-tails to tackle larger prey influences their migration to southern states where larger meals are bountiful.

MEANWHILE, the rough-leg pursues its tiny quarry. When not hunting from a perch or hovering, the keen-eyed predator may fly back and forth across the prairie as methodically as a combine in a wheat field.

JAN L. WASSINK

Rough-legged hawks display two color phases: a light-phase, like the bird pictured here, with light-brown head and breast; and a dark-phase, with chocolate-brown head, breast, and back. Birds of both phases sport the feathery legs that give the bird its name. Because voles (opposite) and mice remain active when freezing temperatures grip the Montana plains, they provide the major food source for wintering rough-legs.

ALAN G. NELSON

A rocky shelf with sheltering overhang provides a perfect nest site for rough-legged hawks. Both sexes carry sticks to build the nest, then line it with plants and feathers to cradle the speckled, brown eggs. Young birds stay in the nest for 40 days.

It's not only this hawk that excels in surviving the sub-zero weather that sometimes grips the Montana plains in winter. Small rodents burrow in the grass for safety and relief from extreme cold. The hunger that drives them from covered runways to clip grasses only gives rough-legs, coyotes, and foxes a moment's chance for success.

Rough-leg populations rise and fall with their prey to the north. The famous lemming explosions make great pickings for predators and an easy upbringing for youngsters. In the boreal regions, these cycles take about four years. Just after a lemming crash, when hawk numbers are still high, we may see greater numbers of rough-legs here in winter. Lack of food to the north forces hawks that normally migrate a short distance south from the Arctic to keep going across the Canadian-U.S. border. Southward migrations of northern birds related to crashes in prey are so regular that biologists have given them a special term: *irruptions*. During such migrations, snowy owls, goshawks, short-eared owls, and rough-legs have been seen as far south as Virginia and California.

The messengers of conditions up north bear other insights for us. Rough-legs tend to be easily approached. They aren't as apt to fly from a perch or a road kill as our summer hawks. They have not learned fear of humans. To them, people are merely another wildlife species passing by in a shared wilderness. Unfortunately, in our country they become easy targets and are often shot, despite federal and state protection. Cars take their toll as well. Large hawks and eagles feasting on road kills sometimes cannot fly away quickly enough to avoid oncoming automobiles.

Those who know the rough-leg best are the native peoples of the tundra. The Eskimos have named the bird for the voice it brings to the Arctic, "squalling hawk." Soon after rough-legs depart Montana and arrive on their summer territory, they relinquish silence and winter's freeze in one breath. Pairs may screech, squeal, or even whistle.

If you tracked our winter hawk to its summer home, you might witness the spring sky dance of a courting male. He soars higher and higher, then tucks his wings and dives recklessly earthward, pulling out of his plunge to ascend again. When at last joined by a female, they fly close together and call. They woo with dance and song above the awakening tundra.

Barry Lopez in *Arctic Dreams* described the connection of tundra and the life that arrives and departs from it so suddenly: "Watching the animals come and go, and feeling the land swell up to meet them and then feeling it grow still at their departure, I came to think of the migrations as breath, as the land breathing in spring a great inhalation of light and animals. The long-bated breath of summer. And an exhalation that propelled them all south in the fall."

During the short interlude between spring and fall, rough-legged hawks must mate, build nests, raise young, and depart before their food disappears. Choosing a nest site is not an easy matter. Resident ravens and gyrfalcons often claim the best cliffs and overhangs. Although peregrine falcons and rough-legs arrive back at their territories simultaneously, the aggressive falcons will drive rough-legs off a nest.

Luckily for the rough-legs, they seem to settle for second choices, even straight across from a peregrine's nest. In the southern part of their range, they can build their 24- to 30-inch-wide stick nests in trees, but most live in treeless lands where the only option may be the top of a boulder. First choice, however, is a cliff perch with a sheltering overhang and an outstanding view. Even finding materials to construct a sturdy nest poses a challenge.

Pairs seek out sticks from dwarf willows or other shrubs to grasp in their talons and carry to the nest. The final touch is a lining of plants and feathers that will cradle their speckled, brown eggs. Birds that are able to hang onto the same nest year after year continue to add sticks and plants, eventually doubling its size.

Many of the details about nesting rough-legged hawks remain as unknown as the hundreds of unnamed valleys and streams of Alaska, the Arctic islands, and the northern reaches of the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Labrador, and Newfoundland. There, they raise their young in the peace of lands where people do not dominate.

From sketchy observations and records, researchers believe that mates stay together at least through the breeding season. Some arrive in spring already paired. Have they bonded during winter? Or are they a pair from previous years? The questions linger. Sizes of territories are similarly unclear. In some places they greatly outnumber all other nesting raptors. You could find a nest every 1.5 square miles. In other places you might have to cover 30 square miles to find a second nest. Availability of food and nesting sites may play a determining role in the size of territories.

Rough-legs nest between April and June. In years when lemmings are plentiful, they lay as many as seven eggs, and as few as two in lean years. The female usually stays on the nest, incubating the eggs for 37 days, on average. The young do not leave the nest for another 40 days. The fledglings then have a mere three to six weeks to master their hunting and flying skills before the snow flies in late August or September. It will be another two to three years before the young will mate, breed, and raise a new generation of hawks.

IT'S NOVEMBER, Thanksgiving, the time of the first big snows in the peaks. A rough-legged hawk glides over a ranch crouched in the shelter of cottonwoods planted there at the turn of the century. Beyond, the Big Hole Valley crests toward the Pioneer Mountains. The ancestor of the bird knew this view. Bison grazed and teepees came and went with the herds. The hawk flies on, now hovering over the lichen-encrusted rocks marking the teepee rings of the Nez Perce who camped and fought and tragically died there. A mouse races from stone to stone. The rough-legged hawk swoops. This time it misses. Flapping onward in the pale, cold light of evening, the bird sees all. ■

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Where, When, and How to Watch Rough-Legged Hawks in Montana

Season: October through March

Time of Day: You can see rough-legs perched any time of day, but you are most likely to see them hunting over grasslands at dusk.

Where: Open prairies, valleys, and farmland across Montana. Some hot spots include: Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge near St. Ignatius; the Big Hole Valley (Wisdom area) in southwest Montana; Dry Creek Road, south of Bridger in south-central Montana.

Field Marks: Look for a large hawk (19-24 inches long) with wide, rounded wings and tail. Colors may be either: (1) chocolate brown, except for white wings underneath and tail (dark phase), or (2) light brown on the head and breast, with a distinctive belly band (light phase). Look also for a black patch at the wrist, or bend of the wings, in flight. The white tail bearing a black band at the end is an excellent field mark for both dark- and light-phase birds. One field guide calls the tail the hawk's "boxer shorts."

Similar Species: The rough-leg is the most common hawk in winter. Immature golden eagles are larger and their flight feathers are dark.

JIM POSEWITZ: EXTRAORDINARY WILDLIFE ADVOCATE

Jim Posewitz, one of the best-known advocates for Montana wildlife and wildlands retired in August after 32 years with the Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

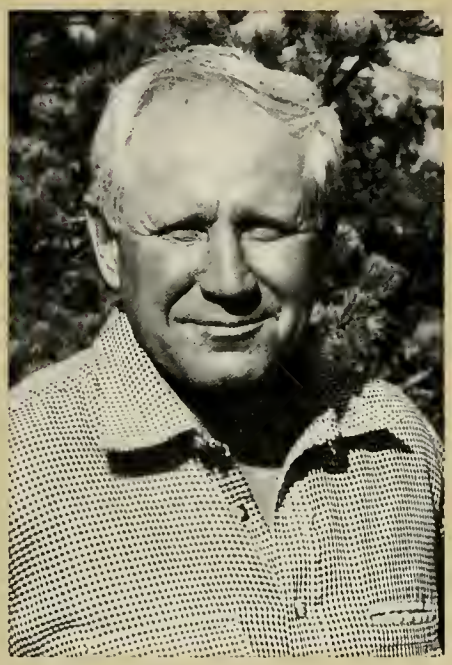
Posewitz ended his career as special assistant to Director Pat Graham to become director of the Helena-based, "Orion, The Hunter's Institute." Orion was created to sustain hunting and the land and resources it depends on.

In commending Posewitz on an accomplished career with FW&P, Governor Marc Racicot said, "Advocacy can be a courageous pursuit in a bureaucracy because the test of right or wrong is determined by time alone. Over the past 32 years, I think time has proven that Jim Posewitz—Montana's most tenacious and thoughtful wildlife advocate—was often right on target."

Early on, Posewitz set out to prove that development of Montana's resources—from strip mines to highways—could be accomplished with environmental sensitivity. Although the times were often turbulent, many believe Posewitz helped to prove common ground could be found in the wide spectrum of environmental, political, and social factors that come to bear on the decisions of FW&P and the State of Montana.

During his three-decade career, Posewitz served under seven governors and worked with nine directors. He administered three different divisions: Environmental Resources, Environment and Information, and Ecological Services.

His achievements over the past three decades include: stream protection legislation, mined-land reclamation legislation, instream flow agreements, development of the Rocky Mountain Front guidelines, establishment of the International Joint Commission for studies on the North Fork of the Flathead, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Wildlife Plan, the direction of endangered species management program, fish and wildlife habitat protection, and



Jim Posewitz

helping to design the first Governor's Symposium on North America's Hunting Heritage.

Perhaps his most enduring achievement was his fight against dam construction on the Yellowstone River, which today remains a spectacular free-flowing river.

In his new pursuit with Orion, Posewitz says he'll raise money for research at Montana State University to document Montana's conservation history, which he considers the most significant in North America. In addition, his book on hunting ethics is forthcoming from Falcon Press.

"The mark of your influence and your wildlife philosophy is chiseled on the heart of Montana," Governor Racicot said. "I think your aim with Orion—The Hunter's Institute—is again right on target. Indeed, every kid taking history in Montana ought to know the history of the preservation of our rivers and our wildlife. And I'll be proud to say that Jim Posewitz, an extraordinary wildlife advocate and philosopher, played a pivotal role in that history for FW&P, and most importantly, for the people of Montana."—*Tom Palmer, information officer, Conservation Education Division, Helena*

BILL KOPPEN NAMED "WILDLIFE OFFICER OF THE YEAR"

Bill Koppen, a Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks game warden based in Great Falls, was named the 1992 recipient of the prestigious Shikar-Safari International's Wildlife Officer of the Year Award for Montana.

A five-year veteran of the department's Enforcement Division, Koppen began his career in Glasgow before being transferred to Great Falls in 1989.

FW&P Director Pat Graham (right) congratulates Region Four Warden Bill Koppen on receiving Shikar-Safari International's Wildlife Officer of the Year Award for Montana.

The Shikar-Safari award winner is selected by the FW&P director from nominations submitted by warden captains in each of the department's eight administrative regions. Winners

are selected on the basis of their professional relationship with sportsmen and landowners in their region, performance and dedication to duty, and participation in activities outside of daily enforcement work.

Koppen was recognized for his abilities to listen to private landowners' concerns, explain departmental policies, and offer assistance. His skill in communicating with the public has garnered a great deal of support for wildlife law enforcement.

"Warden Koppen takes great pride in his field enforcement activities, contacting a substantial number of hunters, fishermen, trappers, and recreationists each year," said Erwin Kent, administrator of the Enforcement Division. "He also has virtually set the standard when it comes to educational programs. Bill speaks to 3,000 to 4,000 people a year during water safety demonstrations. At local boat shows he sets up informational booths pertaining to safety equipment and operation of watercraft. With the number of contacts Bill makes, he provides a great deal of information to the public. This affirms to our customers a commitment by the agency to keep them involved and informed with 'their' business."

The Shikar-Safari award, presented annually by the worldwide conservation organization to one wildlife enforcement officer in each state, has been presented to a Montana game warden each year since 1969.

Early Bird Parks Passport To Go On Sale

The 1994 Early Bird Parks Passport will go on sale on November 26th at all Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks headquarters. Early bird sales will continue through February 14, 1994. The cost of the passport is $12 per vehicle ($15 regular price) and $6 for a second vehicle ($7.50 regular price) if purchased at the same time. Passports are valid for one license year (March 1 through February 28) and are valid immediately upon purchase if affixed to the interior lower left of the windshield. The state parks passport is an annual pass that admits one vehicle and its occupants to all designated fee areas within the state park system.

An early bird passport is a great holiday gift or birthday surprise for someone who enjoys Montana's great outdoors. The 20% savings is only good for a short time so contact the FW&P office located near you or write: Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks; 1420 East Sixth Ave.; Helena, MT 59620.

Trapper Education Program to Begin

Earlier this year, the Montana Trappers Association (MTA) requested financial assistance from the Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FW&P) to fund a trapper education program in Montana. The goal of the program is to instill in trappers the need for safe, legal, ethical, and humane trapping practices.

The 1993 Montana Legislature authorized redirected federal Pittman-Robertson dollars for use in developing this educational program over the next two years. FW&P will provide $9,375 to MTA, which will match this amount with $3,125 worth of in-kind services and/or cash on an annual basis. Beginning in 1996, trapper education funding will be incorporated into the Hunter Education Program funding authority on a permanent basis.

By initiating this program, MTA has demonstrated the commitment of Montana trappers to education. The program will improve public understanding of the role trappers play in managing and conserving Montana furbearers and their habitats.

Objectives of the MTA Trapper Education Program include: (1) providing courses in all trapping districts on an annual basis; (2) certification of volunteer trapper education instructors; and (3) preparation of instructor guides and fur harvester education manuals, comprehensive examinations, and certificates of course completion. The course is designed to instill a broad base of knowledge about trapping ethics, humane trapping techniques, reducing the catch of non-target wildlife, history and tradition of trapping, furbearer management and habitat conservation, wildlife identification, safety, and landowner-trapper-nontrapper relations.

The program will also provide opportunities for MTA to develop an educational lending library of informational literature and videotapes covering fur trapping and furbearer management subjects, and to sponsor educational presentations for school audiences, 4-H clubs, and civic organizations.

Those interested in additional information on the MTA Trapper Education Program are encouraged to contact the MTA education coordinator, Melissa Tuemmler, at (406) 866-3293, or the department's furbearer coordinator, Brian Giddings, at (406) 444-2612.—*Brian Giddings, statewide furbearer coordinator, Wildlife Division, Helena*

1993 Montana Outdoors Index

The major items published in *Montana Outdoors* in 1993 are indexed below. Extra copies of all '93 issues are available at $2 each (includes postage). The following back issues are available at the same price:

1971—July/August, September/October
1972—July/August, September/October, November/December
1973—all issues, except March/April and May/June
1974—all issues
1975—all issues, except September/October
1976—all issues, except January/February
1977—all issues, including Yellowstone Special Issue
1978—all issues, including Special Parks Issue, except May/June
1979—all issues
1980—all issues, including Special Hunting Issue, except January/February and July/August
1981—all issues
1982—all issues, except May/June and November/December
1983—all issues
1984—all issues, except November/December
1985—all issues, except March/April
1986, 1987, 1988, and 1989—all issues
1990—all issues except July/August and September/October
1991—all issues
1992—all issues

To inquire about or order a back issue, write: Back Issues, *Montana Outdoors*, Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 930 West Custer Avenue, Helena, MT 59620.

BOOKS REVIEWED

The Compleat Muzzleloader—by L. Gordon Stetser, Jr. (March/April).

Careers in the Outdoors—by Tom Stienstra, with Robyn Schlueter (March/April).

Rivers of Memory—by Harry Middleton (May/June).

Jack O'Connor's Gun Book—by Jack O'Connor (May/June).

Floating and Recreation on Montana Rivers—by Curt Thompson (September/October).

Ecology and Management of the Mourning Dove—by Thomas S. Baskett, Mark W. Sayre, Roy E. Tomlinson, and Ralph E. Mirarchi (September/October).

FISH/FISHING/WATER

Habitat—Take a Deeper Look—Before you peek at the key on page 20, try to find 44 different plants, fungi, insects, mollusks, amphibians, reptiles, fish, birds, and mammals on this colorful poster (poster by Harold "Rich" Stevenson, March/April).

Second Genesis for Trout—Landowners and biologists in Broadwater County are working together to restore depleted trout populations on the upper Missouri River (Jeff Stoffer, March/April).

Prairie Rainbows—There are rainbow trout in a short stretch of the Missouri River immediately below Fort Peck Dam—and what beauties they are! (Pat Clancey, May/June).

Just for the Record—Four Montana fish records fell in 1992 (Kay Morton Ellerhoff, May/June).

Our Point of View—A new department film—*Three Men, Three Rivers*—weaves the mystery and beauty of Montana's wild rivers with the people who knew them best (Patrick J. Graham, May/June).

Catch-and-Release Techniques Help Trout Survive—There are five steps to follow in helping released trout survive (Tom Palmer, The Catchall, July/August).

Bel-Air on the Big Hole—A favorite uncle, a fishing car, and trips across the Continental Divide make for happy remembrances of the Big Hole River (Scott Waldie, illustrated by Lee Stroncek, September/October).

Kids' Day on the Big Hole—Herb and Joyce Hall combine forces with FW&P, TU, the Big Hole River Foundation, and area businesses to teach kids about fishing, floating, bugs, and boats (Mike Gurnett, November/December).

GAME/HUNTING

Perspectives—Highlands Ram Tops 'Em All—Found in the Highland Mountains/Maiden Rock area south of Butte, this bighorn sheep ram is the largest recorded for the United States (Michael R. Frisina and Jack Atcheson, Jr., March/April).

Auction Boosts Sheep and Moose Programs—Montana's sheep hunting license sold for $205,000 at the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep's annual convention in Reno (The Catchall, May/June).

The Elkhorns Revisited—Thanks to new regulations, hunters, photographers, and wildlife watchers are now seeing elk of all ages in the Elkhorn Mountains (John Vore, July August).

How Old is that Bird?—Examining primary wing feathers can help hunters determine the age of the game birds they've bagged (Bruce Auchly, September/October).

Perspectives—Why Men Hunt—The motivations for hunting are cemented with emotions that verge on the metaphysical (John Madson, illustrated by John Robinson, September/October).

Pheasants Forever Sponsors "Take a Kid Hunting Day"—Members of the Central Montana Chapter of Pheasants Forever take youngsters on their first pheasant hunt (Bill Berg, The Catchall, September/October).

The Ducks of Winter—A late-season waterfowl hunt harvests memories as well as mallards (Bernie Kuntz, November/December).

Perspectives—A Husband, a Hunter, and Vice-Versa—A fanatical elk hunter is torn between two of the things he loves most (Chris Dahl, November/December).

Hunting in Montana: Resolving the Conflicts—Cooperation among landowners, sportsmen, and outfitters is the key to preserving Montana's hunting heritage (Chase T. Hibbard, November/December).

GENERAL

Davis Wins 1993 Waterfowl Stamp Contest—Helena artist Darrell Davis' rendition of a pair of harlequin ducks took top honors in this year's waterfowl stamp competition (William Phippen, March/April).

Racicot Appoints Graham as FW&P Director—Patrick Graham, a 15-year department veteran, is appointed new director of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (The Catchall, March/April).

Our Point of View—Montana's strength lies in diversity and community spirit as we forge a future for ourselves and our children (Patrick J. Graham, March/April).

Perspectives—A Blooming Medley—A springtime smorgasbord that combines wildflowers and words (May/June).

Governor Racicot Names Three New Commissioners—Stan Meyer, David W. Simpson, and Charles R. Decker are appointed to the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission (The Catchall, May/June).

Scratching for Answers—Swimmer's itch is caused by a tiny parasitic worm, a member of the group of flatworms called flukes (Craig Spencer and Brent Loken, July/August).

Our Point of View—Today's wildlife populations stand as a testament to the early and continued conservation efforts of many Montanans (Patrick J. Graham, July/August).

Department Employees Garner Awards—Vince Yannone, Kurt Cunningham, Heidi Youmans, and Gary Burke receive Montana Wildlife Federation awards (The Catchall, July/August).

Survival Tips—If you're headed for a fall outing, be sure to keep survival awareness in the back of your mind and survival gear in your pack (Tom Daniels, September/October).

Our Point of View—Montana's citizen legislators face formidable challenges in resolving wildlife management conflicts (Patrick J. Graham, November/December).

Discovering a Sense of Place—Five young Russians spend a summer with FW&P, learning about the "real America" (Justin Harris, November/December).

PARKS/DEPARTMENT LANDS

Have RV, Will Travel—Volunteer park hosts have contributed countless hours toward making Montana's parks more pleasant places to visit (John Fraley, March/April).

Lands Legacy—A Home Where Elk and Cattle Roam—Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area serves as a model for the compatibility of cattle grazing and wildlife (Bernie Kuntz, March/April).

The Best of the Badlands—Makoshika State Park is proof that badlands offer some of Montana's most hauntingly beautiful scenery (Mike Sullivan, May/June).

Lands Legacy—A Key to the Past—By studying artifacts found at Pictograph Cave, archaeologists are learning more about the prehistoric inhabitants of the Northern Great Plains (Ken Oravsky and Rich Pittsley, May/June).

Perspectives—Art for the Parks—Ryan Clampitt, a fifth grader at Jim Darcy School in Helena, won the second annual State Parks Poster Contest (Debbie Cheek, July/August).

Lands Legacy—Room With a View—Wall Creek Wildlife Management Area provides plenty of grass and open space for wintering elk and deer (Bernie Kuntz, July/August).

Deep Blood Kettle—Studies are yielding new information on the prehistoric people who ran bison over the cliff at Ulm Pishkun State Park (Bruce Auchly, July/August).

Lands Legacy—A River Runs by It—Kootenai Falls Wildlife Management Area provides a riverside home for bighorn sheep, deer, bear, and other wildlife (Jerry Brown, September/October).

Lands Legacy—Forever Elk, Forever Wind—History and wildlife intertwine on the department's first big game winter range, the Judith Wildlife Management Area (Dick Bucsis, November/December).

WILDLIFE

Outsiders Looking In—While most of us value seeing wild animals in their natural surroundings, how many of us watch them safely and responsibly? Watching wildlife takes ethics (Deborah Richie, March/April).

Watchable Wildlife—Greyhound of the Air—The pintail's profile in flight is long-necked, sleek, and streamlined (Dave Books, March/April).

Watchable Wildlife—Loon Music—The loon's freedom, independence, and simplicity characterize the true spirit of wilderness (Deborah Richie, May/June).

Wildlife Doc—Beth Sorensen has been called the Florence Nightingale of wildlife rehabilitation (John Fraley, May/June).

Whitewater Wonder—Considered a sea duck, the harlequin spends most of its time on coastal waters, coming inland only to nest on turbulent mountain streams (Dave Genter, July/August).

Watchable Wildlife—Gem of the Bird World—The lazuli bunting resembles a bluebird that has shrunk in the wash (Erick Greene, July/August).

A Reflection on Black-Footed Ferrets—Release of captive-bred ferrets in north-central Montana next fall may halt this enigmatic species' slide toward extinction (Tom Palmer, September/October).

Watchable Wildlife—Montana's Eclectic Collectors—The bushy-tailed woodrat's odd collecting habits provide scientists with clues to historic plant and animal migrations (Alexandra Murphy, September/October).

Our Point of View—The black-footed ferret has been gone from Montana's prairies for many years, and its reintroduction is a source of controversy (Patrick J. Graham, September/October).

Watchable Wildlife—Of Winter, Windswept Landscapes, and Rough-Legged Hawks—Hunkering on fence posts or telephone poles, rough-legged hawks are common winter visitors to the Montana grasslands (Deborah Richie and John McNeal, November/December).

Fox of the Treetops—A research project in southwestern Montana sheds light on the habitat needs of this common but seldom-seen member of the weasel family (Craig Fager, November/December).

JUDITH RIVER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

FOREVER ELK, FOREVER WIND

by DICK BUCSIS

DAVE BOOKS

THE PIGEYE BASIN, Yogo, and Charlie Russell are three historic names associated with central Montana's Judith River country. Located a few miles southwest of Utica at the east end of the Little Belt Mountains where the South and Middle forks of the Judith River and Yogo Creek join to form the main Judith River drainage, the Pigeye Basin provides important winter range for elk and deer. For those who have never heard of Utica, it sits about 35 miles west of Lewistown in Judith Basin

DAVE BOOKS

RUSSELL POINT
NAMED FOR THE COWBOY ARTIST WHO LIVED IN THIS VALLEY WITH JAKE HOOVER FROM 1880 TO 1889
LEWIS AND CLARK NATIONAL FOREST

Cowboy artist Charlie Russell's first Montana experiences centered on the Utica and Pigeye Basin area in the late 1800s. He lived for two years with mountain man Jake Hoover, not far from the present-day site of the Judith Wildlife Management Area.

County. A few miles up Yogo Creek, where prospectors struck gold in the 1870s, old Yogo Town sprang up and lived and died in a few short years. During the same period, Yogo sapphires were discovered near where the creek exits the mountains. Mining of these blue gems has long since seen its heyday; however, several small mining operations still hang on today near the old diggings.

Cowboy artist Charlie Russell's first Montana experiences centered on the Utica, South Fork of the Judith River, and Pigeye Basin area. He landed at Utica in the spring of 1880 to work for Pike Miller and Jack Waite at their nearby sheep ranch. Shepherding didn't much suit the 16-year-old Charlie, and he soon proved a dismal failure. He left the sheep ranch after two months and joined company with Jake Hoover, ex-miner and mountain man. Hoover lived in a small cabin on the lower South Fork of the Judith River, devoting his time to hunting big game, selling the meat to the settlers out in the basin, and fur trapping. Jake's easygoing lifestyle suited Russell just fine, allowing him time to observe wildlife in their natural settings and begin to work seriously with his sketches and watercolors. Charlie stayed with Jake two years, leaving to give the cowboy life of cattle drives, night herding, and general rough frontier living a try. Russell lasted in the basin until 1890, departing because, in his words, "The Judith country was getting pretty well settled and sheep had the range, so the cowmen decided to move."

In the 10 years Russell lived in the Pigeye Basin, he saw the once-abundant big game populations nearly eliminated. By 1900, excessive livestock numbers and indiscriminate year-round hunting had virtually wiped out the antelope, elk,

DAVE BOOKS

deer, bighorn sheep, and buffalo, once so plentiful in the Little Belt Mountains and surrounding areas. Between 1915 and 1917, at the urging of local farmers and ranchers, the few surviving elk in the Little Belts were supplemented with 47 elk captured in Yellowstone National Park. Elk remained scarce through the early 1920s, though, so in 1928 another 86 elk from Yellowstone were transplanted near Bower Canyon. By the 1930s the transplants had begun to pay dividends, and elk became plentiful enough in the upper Judith drainage to allow re-establishment of hunting seasons. Mule deer, too, became more numerous, increasing the attractiveness of the area for hunting.

The first recorded complaint of agricultural damage caused by elk in the Pigeye Basin came from the Baxter Ranch in 1938. The area's elk population then numbered about 325 animals and the need for big game winter range was becoming increasingly apparent. Prior to this time, Montana game management had followed a simple conservation philosophy: protect wildlife from overhunting and predators. But managers began to recognize that, in addition to regulated hunting, high-quality forage, cover, and space were necessary for proper wildlife management.

To provide needed winter range, in 1938 the Montana Fish and Game Department initiated a land acquisition program in the northwest corner of the Pigeye Basin. The initial land purchase was the 237-acre Williams property north of Bower Canyon. This purchase, along with the adjoining 1,004-acre Setter property acquired in 1940, formed the nucleus of what is now the Judith River Wildlife Management Area. The Judith River WMA thus became the first land purchased in Montana using sportsmen's dollars for the benefit of big game animals. Other significant acquisitions in 1950, 1952, and 1958, utilizing federal Pittman/Robertson Act funds (revenue derived from an excise tax on firearms and ammunition), eventually expanded the WMA to more than 5,000 acres. Funding for the most recent addition, the 1,893-acre Rogers property purchased in 1992, was made possible through House Bill 526, a state law passed in 1987 earmarking revenue from certain license fees for lease or acquisition of wildlife habitat.

THE JUDITH RIVER WMA comprises lands bordering the Lewis and Clark National Forest on the west and south and privately owned land on the north and east. The Judith River lies 1.5 miles to the east and Yogo Creek adjoins the property on the southwest corner. The old diggings for Yogo sapphires occupy a narrow strip of land bisecting the entire length of the southern portion of the WMA. The mining claims have long ago been patented and constitute a private inholding, but because active mining in the WMA has ceased except for private recreational digs, the open trenches are currently being filled and the surface reclaimed.

The present WMA consists of 7,745 acres, with 6,804 acres deeded to FW&P. Withdrawn public domain contributes 195 acres; state school trust land, 496 acres; and special-use national forest land, 250 acres. Elevations range from 5,000 feet at the east entrance to 6,650 feet at the top of Tepee Butte. Gentle slopes, ridges, fields, and benches dominate the topography. Although some small stream courses flow intermittently, no permanent water sources, except for a few small springs on the Rogers property, exist on the WMA. The highly porous, fractured limestone subsurface precludes establishment of reservoir-type impoundments. Annual precipitation ranges from 12 to 18 inches, mostly falling from March through June. Snowfall is generally moderate and often accompanied by strong southwest winds. Periodic warm, dry winds—*chinooks*—are common during winter. The mean high and low temperatures are 52.8 °F and 23.1 °F, respectively, and the average frost-free period is 95 days.

The WMA's wintering elk herd ranges from 900 to 1,200 animals, depending on the severity of the winter. The elk

herd's summer-fall range covers approximately 375,000 acres of the Little Belt Mountains, plus some habitat in adjacent mountain ranges. During a typical year, 2,500 to 3,500 hunters generate between 15,000 and 18,000 hunter-days in this area, harvesting 300 to 400 elk from the population. The WMA also provides winter range for migratory mule deer and year-round habitat for small populations of white-tailed deer and pronghorns. A few sharp-tailed and blue grouse may be found seasonally on the area. Black bears, mountain lions, and bobcats are occasional visitors.

Because of the area's long history of livestock overgrazing and subsequent vegetative and soil deterioration, much effort has been devoted to improving the WMA's range conditions over the past 50 years. Most of the better sites—especially the swales and benches—were farmed at some point prior to FW&P ownership and converted to smooth brome and crested wheatgrass. Unfortunately, neither of these grasses provides palatable or nutritious forage for wintering elk. Department management over the years has been directed toward improving vegetation by (1) monitoring plant composition, growth, and wildlife use, (2) converting previously farmed land to vegetation preferred by elk, and (3) fertilizing reseeded areas to increase forage palatability and production.

MICHAEL J. BARLOW

The Judith WMA provides winter range for migratory mule deer (above) and 900 to 1,200 wintering elk.

Elimination of grazing during the primary growing season has done much to improve the native rangeland. Also, more than 700 acres of previously farmed land has been converted to highly productive and preferred elk forage through reseeding and fertilization. Studies have documented that the reseeded areas on the WMA provide an average of 1.3 million pounds of forage annually, compared with about 2.5 million pounds produced on native grassland. On a per-acre basis, the reseeded areas produce more than twice as much preferred elk forage as the native grasslands.

The recent Rogers acquisition has added approximately 1,200 acres of native grassland to the WMA. The purchase agreement allows the Rogers Land and Cattle Company to continue livestock grazing for a minimum of 25 years, but at a significantly reduced level. Because a portion of the new property needs vegetative improvement to reach its optimum elk winter range potential, initial management will entail complete rest from livestock grazing for a period, followed by closely monitored cattle grazing using a rest-rotation system. We are currently exploring the prospect of incorporating nearby private land as pastures for the grazing system through conservation easements or leases.

Vehicle travel restrictions and road closures are used on the WMA to provide habitat security for elk during the fall, winter, and spring. However, because a county road to the national forest runs through the middle of the WMA, traffic-related disturbance reduces the usefulness of vegetation near the road for wintering big game. Normally, the mine inholdings result in negligible human activity at times when elk are present.

Future habitat management practices will include continued restoration of previously farmed areas to increase winter forage for big game, prescribed burning or cutting of ponde-

rosa pine to prevent forest encroachment onto the grassland, and limited cattle grazing to stimulate early green-up of forage, thus attracting elk and reducing their use of adjacent private property during spring. The latter effort will require innovative use of limited water sources and portable, solar-powered electric fencing.

Thanks to Charlie Russell's artwork depicting trappers, hunters, cowboys, and Indians in the Pigeye Basin landscape, it takes little imagination to stand today on the Judith River WMA and see into the past. I've seen the mountain man holding his rifle high over the dead bull elk from "When Tracks Spells Meat," and I've seen the "Exalted Ruler" and his harem of cows and calves. I can stand at the six or so abandoned homesteads and see sweat, toil, dreams, and lost hope. It is all there, for anyone to see and know, as the trees and grass sing along with the forever wind.

I can also see the future, with a man and his son or daughter stalking a group of feeding elk, the young hunter thrilled by the prospect of a first elk, and the father proud to be the one to introduce his child to a lifetime of the fulfilling pleasure of hunting and the land. The future holds the promise of providing the legacy and unparalleled treasure of Montana wildlife and wildlife habitat in the Judith's Pigeye Basin. ■

CRAIG JOURDONNAIS

The primary goal of the Judith WMA is to provide high-quality forage for wintering elk and deer, as well as recreational opportunities.

JUDITH RIVER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Location: In Judith Basin County, approximately 11 miles southwest of Utica at the east end of the Little Belt Mountains.

Size: 7,745 acres.

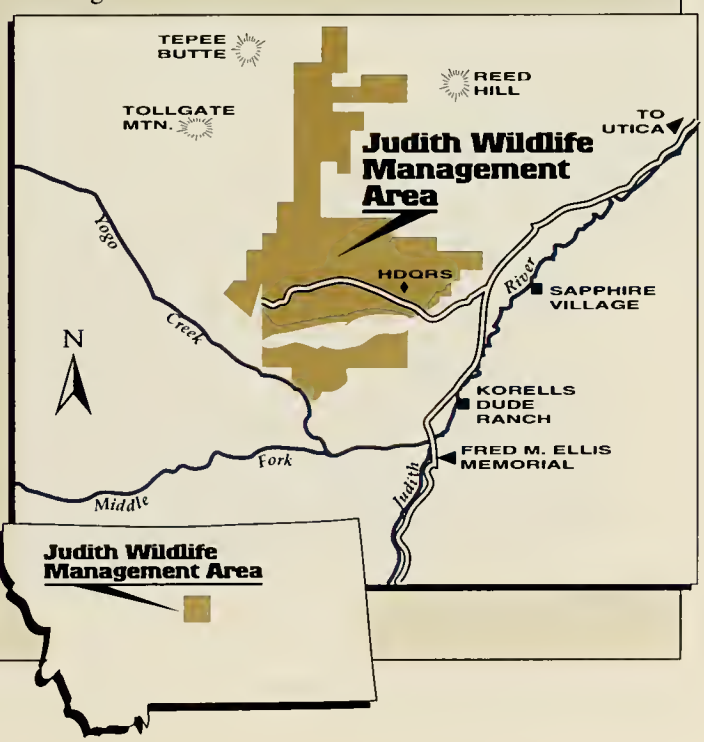
Acquisition date: 1938, 1940, 1950s, 1992.

Access: From U.S. Highway 87 at Windham (seven miles east of Stanford), take paved route 239 south for 11 miles to Utica; from Utica take the main gravel road heading southwest along the north side of the Judith River for nine miles to Sapphire Village; then turn right on the first road just past the village and proceed 1.5 miles west to the Judith River WMA headquarters.

Management goal: To provide high-quality and abundant vegetation for wintering elk and other wildlife species, to keep elk numbers in balance with available forage, and to provide public recreational opportunities.

Hunting opportunities: Archery and rifle hunting seasons for elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, antelope, and black bear are open to licensed hunters. Rifle hunting for elk is by special permit only; there is no general-license elk hunting except during the archery season. Limited opportunities exist for upland game bird hunting.

Wildlife viewing: Winter presents the best opportunities for viewing elk and deer; however, the WMA is closed to recreational activity between December 1 and May 15. Big game animals may be viewed from the county road throughout the year depending on weather conditions (the county does not maintain the road through the WMA during the winter months, and snow accumulations often preclude travel). White-tailed deer and antelope can be seen in spring, summer, and fall, as can a variety of raptors, small mammals, and songbirds.



Kids' Day on the Big Hole

story and photos by MIKE GURNETT

ALTHOUGH THERE are many variations on the theme, the basic premise is the same: we must invest in the children for they are our future. In southwestern Montana, where summer vacations and the salmonfly hatch go hand in hand, there's an investment a little different from the three "R's."

For the third consecutive year, youngsters from

Getting to know the warden

Learning to cast

Fly tying class

Entomology

Herb and Joyce Hall

Butte's Big Brothers and Big Sisters program have ventured to the banks of the Big Hole River to learn about fishing, floating, bugs, and boats. The event, called "Kids' Day on the Big Hole," is hosted by Herb and Joyce Hall, a couple who spend their winters in California and summers on the Big Hole.

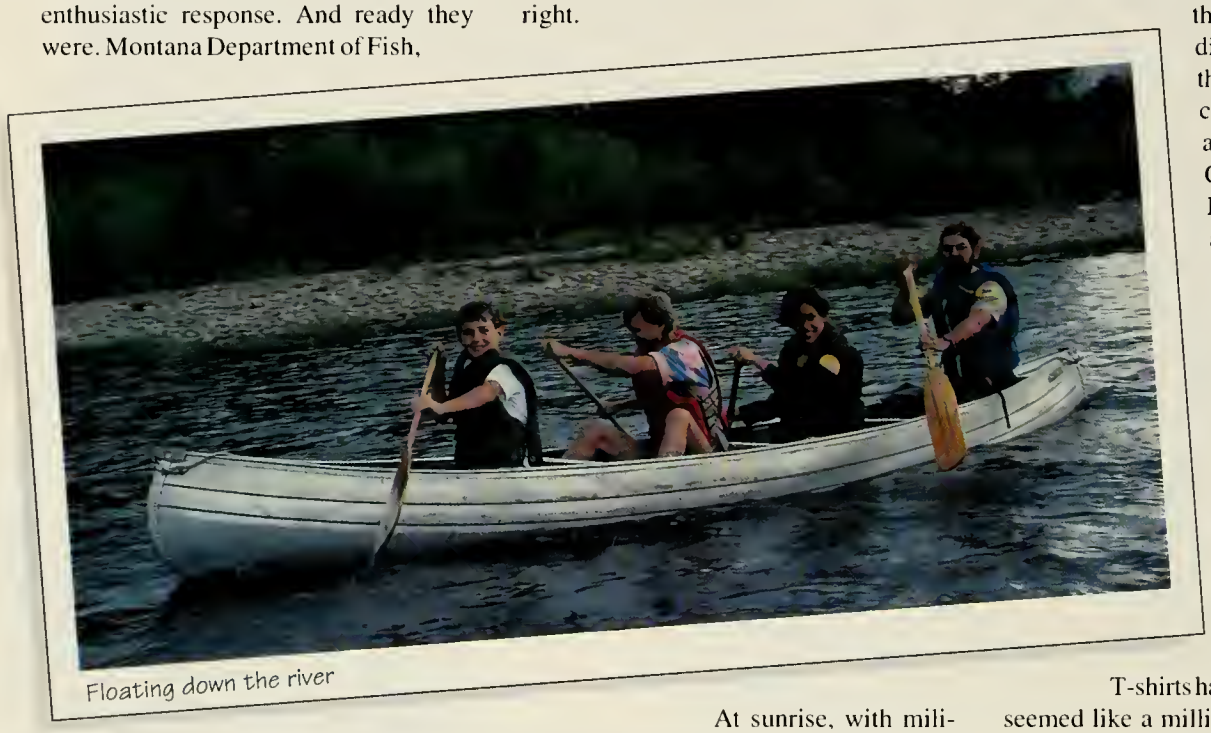
"I love to see the kids come, some aren't quite sure if they want to be here or not," Joyce said. "And to see them leave, just excited and talking about coming back next year, that's one of the things I love."

Herb added, "I think we have as much fun as the kids do, maybe more."

Kids' Day is the complete package of education, entertainment, and energy. But the idea, admits Herb, grew from a much different atmosphere. "I'd been out fishing one evening and I'd gotten skunked—I didn't have a fish after three hours. I came back in and sat down and was thinking that

if I'd learned to catch fish instead of golf when I was a kid maybe I'd have caught some fish that night. One thing led to another and I thought, here we have all this room, a perfect spot for kids who haven't had the opportunity to get out and learn."

When you put out an invitation for over 60 kids to come to your home and spend a day learning to fish and going on a float trip, you'd better be ready for an enthusiastic response. And ready they were. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FW&P) warden Mark Anderson volunteered to chair this year's festivities. "I received tremendous support from area businesses and clubs, everyone. But, at times it got to be a little bit of a nightmare," confessed Anderson.



Floating down the river

When you stop and think about the logistics of breakfast, lunch, beverages, boats, personal flotation devices (PFDs), emergency medical needs, and rest rooms for all those kids and another 30 adults it becomes clear that what is needed is an organizer who has a sincere interest. "I'm involved because I think the Big Hole is the finest river in Montana. Maybe it's the color of the brown trout, or maybe it's the country it runs through. This is an opportunity for kids to get a look at the river that they might not otherwise have," Anderson said.

Through Anderson, several Butte, Dillon, and Helena businesses lent their support with meals, beverages, portable rest rooms, rods, boats, and banners. Technical support came from Trout Unlimited, The Big Hole River Foundation, area outfitters, additional FW&P personnel, and local emergency medical technicians, all of whom willingly received their assignments. These folks decided to trade a day of work and/or fishing to help the children, and they weren't about to spare any time or effort in getting things right.

At sunrise, with military precision, the Halls' waterfront greenery was transformed into the complete fishing campus. The outdoor classrooms included fly and spin casting, fly tying, PFDs and water safety, catch and release, and entomology.

After the guests arrived it was first things first—breakfast. There was already talk about the final exam, the float trip, and the graduation present, a new T-shirt. Soon the youngsters split into groups and hurried off to spend about 30 minutes at each of the hands-on classes.

The class that typified the way things would go was entomology, headed by FW&P biologist Dick Oswald. Dick started by screening the river for aquatic life. While he was in the river, a fair amount of fidgeting, daydreaming, and general goofing off went on. But when Dick dumped the contents into a tub on the bank, the kids really lit up and the questions started flying. Soon, several budding biologists began learning about life forms they didn't even know existed. As Warden Anderson watched the transformation, he commented, "You look at the kids' faces, how they're listening to Dick, and you know they're grabbing onto something that's going to stay with them."

Often during the summer afternoons of 1993, Montana received a rain shower, and this day was no exception. However, the change in weather didn't dampen the enthusiasm. The time had come for the much-anticipated float trip. Coats were located, PFDs strapped on, and away they went. This was not the stretch of river to be on that day if you were looking for a little solitude. The laughter could be heard for miles.

BEFORE you knew it, the boats were back on their trailers, the rods in cases, the pile of T-shirts had dwindled, and what seemed like a million "thank yous" and "you're welcomes" had been said. As the last carload of happy faces headed out of sight, Herb asked, "Okay, how can we make it better?" Next year begins.

Kids' Day on the Big Hole is about fishing, floating, bugs, and boats. Kids' day is also about how important the Big Hole River is to life in southwestern Montana. It's about learning that the person with the gun and badge is a good guy, it's about people helping people. When the dust settles and the sun sets, the reason Kids' Day On The Big Hole works finally becomes clear. As Joyce put it: "Herb and I have talked about it—the kids are learning something special here. When they come to a point in their life when they're frustrated and angry perhaps they'll pick up a fishing rod instead of doing something that could be detrimental to themselves, their families, or society. That means a lot to me." ■

Discovering a Sense of Place

by Justin Harris

For anyone willing to plummet into a portal of mountains, prairies, and staggering panoramas of the Big Sky country, canoeing down the limestone corridors of the Smith River can be a splendid splash of adventure. Hundreds of Montanans enjoy this spectacular river journey every year. This summer, the Smith's winding waters played host to a small group of students and scholars seeking a different type of environmental education. What was unique about their experience is that while many of us travel only a few hours to find ourselves in the backcountry, this band of voyagers crossed 10 time zones from a city with a population 10 times greater than all of Montana.

TERRY LONNER

LIZ LODMAN

Five Russian students—Anton Khmelnitsky, Kate Ghelukh, Eugene Revjakin, Kirill Semion (left to right above) and Denis Svetlov (left)—spent last summer working as interns for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

Denis Svetlov, Anton Khmelnitsky, Kate Ghelukh, Kirill Semion, and Eugene Revjakin arrived in Montana last spring as student interns from Moscow State University and other professional training institutes of Russia. They worked during the summer as volunteers for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FW&P), learning about the "real America" and how we manage our natural resources. The program, coordinated for FW&P by Bud Solmonsson, evolved into a fruitful opportunity for the Russian students,

Ron Lukenbill and Tanya Samsanova-Lukenbill (below) of Helena helped organize the cross-cultural exchange that brought the Russian students to Montana. Intern Kate Ghelukh (right) helps care for orphaned raccoons at the FW&P animal shelter in Helena.

TERRY LONNER

BILL PHIPPEN

FW&P, Moscow State University, and Montana citizens as a whole.

The cross-cultural exchange was facilitated by Crossroads/ Kpoccpoydz, a non-profit organization formed in 1993 by Ron Lukenbill and Tanya Samsonova-Lukenbill of Helena and Irina Mochalova of Moscow, Russia. The group also organizes other student and faculty exchanges between the former states of the Soviet Union and Montana. Crossroads/ Kpoccpoydz and the Russian Exchange Steering Committee, created by FW&P to manage the program, are currently working out the procedures for sending a small group of Montana student interns to work and study in Russian parks and wilderness areas next summer.

Three students were assigned to FW&P regional offices in Missoula, Bozeman, and Great Falls, one student to the agency's Helena headquarters, and one to the Montana Conservation Corps out of Bozeman. Care was taken to ensure that each student would be exposed to most aspects of the department and its mission, including parks management and operation, administration, conservation education and public affairs, fisheries management, wildlife management, enforcement, and field services.

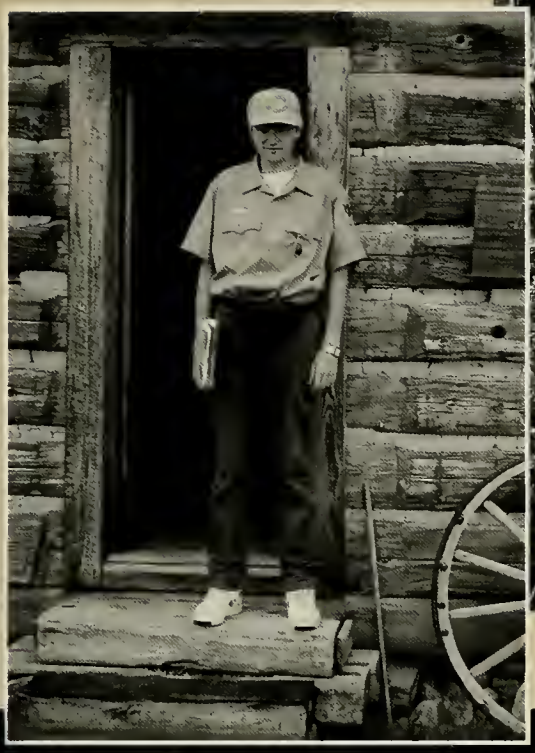
Not surprisingly, the most popular question asked of the students during their stay was, "How do you like Montana?" Kate, the intern hosted by the Helena headquarters, seemed to be counting the number of times with her penchant for seeking amusing moments. At one point she said that she had been asked how she liked it here 139 times. Anton, who worked in the Missoula region, had the question figured out. In fact, he usually didn't even answer the question. He just responded, "It seems to be a small community gathering of hunters and fishermen."

More consuming was the cross-cultural learning. The students were overwhelmed by American technology, such as the abundance of nice cars, but impressed by the amount of wildlife intermingled with human existence. Gene, the intern who served in the Bozeman region, claimed that "Montanans are crazed with their care of the land, and it is this that is quite unusual...but I think, for sure, that this is nice." Kate backed him up by describing how at home, in Moscow, one can just "throw candy wrappers out of the car window and if they hit the car next to you, everything is okay."

Interesting comments! You knew that the students were thinking about the difference a strong conservation education can make. They were very much interested in a population of people who strive not to take their natural resources for granted, but to maintain and sustain that heritage. Anton perceived Montanans as having much room and many resources. He said that we are lucky to have been "provided the opportunity to think and reflect about how to manage what we value." He liked to talk about cultivating mindsets and conserving what to him seems a "legacy."

The students see people in Russia working very hard, but unenlightened to conservation mindedness. Many are working

TERRY LONNER



LEE BASTIAN

During their summer in Montana, the interns assisted FW&P employees in many facets of fisheries, wildlife, and parks management. Counterclockwise from left are Eugene Revjakin, Anton Khmelnitsky, and Kate Ghelukh.

JUSTIN HARRIS

to achieve something that has to do with money and impressing their friends, contributing more and more to the destruction of the earth. Anton further noted that "this is simply because many of our people cannot see the world raw, as we Russian students are now seeing it in Montana." Gene reflected, "But this is not only a Russian problem, it is a global problem."

During the eight-week program, the host families, student sponsors, and Russian exchange committee members alike learned more about the concept of family, cooperation, biocentrism, and home. And after a sendoff from Montana's governor, a presentation of certificates, and wishes of prosperity, the Russian students who arrived so eager to learn suddenly were traveling back home, grasping firmly to what they had experienced. We hope they will cherish what they have learned in the working environment of FW&P and their host state. Surely these students are on their way, hoping to balance progress at home with conservation of resources for the future.

Reflecting back on our Smith River adventure, one important impression sticks in my mind. Here were Russians and Americans breaking the ice and learning from each other, with each other, culturally and cross-culturally. I remember the Americans discussing among themselves their experiences with each other and with the visiting Russians. I can see in my mind's eye the gab sessions and hear the laughter present at every meal, work site, and bend in the river. I can still see from the screen of my tent the glow of our campfire throughout the trees. And, among the flames, the dancing shadows of the Russians' actions and inquiries, the sharing of songs and stories, the chuckles about life on the Smith under the Big Sky, it came to mind that we all were on the verge of discovering something...perhaps a sense of place. ■

Contributors

There are advantages to hunting ducks late in the season, says **Bernie Kuntz**, the department's information officer in Bozeman (Region 3). For one thing, you won't find a lot of hunters out because of the cold weather. For another, hunting is often great this time of year. For an account of a special last-day mallard hunt, turn to Kuntz's article beginning on page 2.

"Hunkering on fence posts or telephone poles, they are sentinels of the cold." That's how **Deborah Richie** and **John McNeal** describe rough-legged hawks, common winter visitors to Montana that soar down from the Arctic in search of mice and voles. To find out more about these hawks and where they can be observed, turn to page 6. Richie is a wildlife interpretive specialist in the department's Missoula office (Region 2), and McNeal is a Billings-based writer and photographer who specializes in outdoor subjects.

As a wildlife biologist in White Sulphur Springs, **Dick Bucsis** is responsible for a portion of central Montana encompassing the east Big Belts, the Little Belts, and the Castle Mountains—a region where mountain men, miners, cowboys, and wildlife all have colorful histories. In this issue's installment of "Lands Legacy," Bucsis details the history of the Judith Wildlife Management Area, "the first land purchased in Montana using sportsmen's dollars for the benefit of big game animals" (see page 15).

Gurnett

Last summer, for the third consecutive year, youngsters from Butte's Big Brothers and Big Sisters program ventured to the banks of the Big Hole River to learn about fishing, floating, bugs, and boats. Hosted by Herb and Joyce Hall and supported by several Butte, Dillon, and Helena businesses, Trout Unlimited, The Big Hole River Foundation, area outfitters, FW&P personnel, and local residents, the event is called "Kids' Day on the Big Hole." As **Mike Gurnett** says in his article beginning on page 20, "When you put out an invitation for over 60 kids to come to your home and spend a day learning to fish and going on a float trip, you'd better be ready for enthusiastic response." Gurnett, who helped out with "Kids' Day" last August, is the department's film production supervisor in Helena.

As part of a cross-cultural exchange program, five young Russians spent last summer in Montana working as FW&P volunteeers—learning about the department's mission and assisting in a variety of resource management tasks. **Justin Harris**, a recent University of Montana graduate and summer intern with the department's Parks Division, chronicles their activities in his article beginning on page 23. Harris is now back at UM working as a research assistant in the Institute of Tourism and Recreation.

Fager

Although they are seldom seen, pine martens are common occupants of several western Montana mountain ranges. **Craig Fager**, who studied martens while working on his master's degree at Montana State University, describes how these fascinating predators are affected by logging, fur harvest, and fluctuating prey populations in his article entitled "Fox of the Treetops" (page 27). Fager currently works as a biological technician for the department in Bozeman.

Cooperation among landowners, sportsmen, and outfitters is the key to preserving Montana's hunting heritage, says state legislator **Chase Hibbard**. In an effort to begin healing the divisiveness that exists among these groups, Hibbard sponsored a bill in the last legislature creating a Private Land/Public Wildlife Advisory Council. To learn more about what the council hopes to accomplish, turn to his article on page 32. A landowner, hunter, and fisherman, Hibbard is president of the Sieben Live Stock Company and a first-term member of the Montana House of Representatives.

Hibbard

It's a dilemma faced by many ardent big game hunters every fall. As **Chris Dahl** puts it, "I was caught smack between two of the things I love most in life, my wife and elk hunting." Should he attend the wedding of his wife's sister in California, or honor his commitment to "E-Day," the October opening of the general elk season? You'll have to read his "Perspectives" piece on page 35 to find out how one young husband negotiated this tricky minefield of domestic relations. **Dave McGee's** colorful cartoons are a perfect match for Dahl's humor. Dahl is a self-employed wholesale distributor in Helena, and McGee is a Great Falls-based artist and photographer whose work regularly appears in *MO*.

Dahl

MO thanks the following photographers and artists for their contributions to this issue: **Michael J. Barlow**, Bozeman; **Steve Dahmer**, Fort Collins, CO; **Justin Harris**, Missoula; **Dan and Cindy Hartman**, Silver Gate; **Mike Logan**, Helena; **Dave McGee**, and **Alan G. Nelson**, Great Falls; and **Jan L. Wassink**, Kalispell. Thanks also to the following contributors who work for the department: **Lee Bastian**, Missoula; **Mike Gurnett**, **Craig Jourdonnais**, and **Bill Phippen**, Helena; and **Terry Lonner**, Bozeman.

DAN & CINDY HARTMAN

DAN & CINDY HARTMAN

Fox of the Treetops

by CRAIG FAGER

IN RECENT YEARS the pine marten, a member of the weasel family long prized for its soft, dense fur, has moved from relative obscurity to the forefront of the debate over management of our nation's forests. The marten, or American sable, historically has been regarded as a species dependent on old-growth coniferous forests. Once found throughout much of northern New England and the northern Lake States, the marten is rarely seen in those areas today. In the Pacific Northwest, the Intermountain West, Canada, and Alaska, the marten is still abundant, but logging practices and fur harvest levels have raised concerns about its future in these regions as well.

In Montana, martens are common occupants of several western mountain ranges and less common and scattered in others. The isolated ranges of southwestern Montana, including the Crazy Mountains and Absaroka-Beartooth ranges, represent the eastern boundary of marten distribution in the state. The marten has specialized habitat needs, and its range limits are a product of forest habitat availability and related prey distribution.

With its foxlike face, erect ears, and shiny black eyes, the marten is a picture of alertness and curiosity. Although coat color varies among individuals, most martens have yellowish-brown fur shading to dark brown on the tail and legs. A buff or orangish throat patch extends downward to the breast. The stiff, glossy guard hairs range from one to two inches in length and the dense, silky underfur is about an inch in depth.

Martens have five toes on each foot with sharp, semiretractable claws about a half-inch in length. They are acrobatic tree climbers, easily jumping from branch to branch, tree to tree, or from tree to ground. Like squirrels, martens can rotate their hind feet and climb down tree trunks headfirst.

At just two to four pounds in weight and about two feet in length (including the long, bushy tail), martens are among the smallest predators in the forest. This dictates that they are alternately the hunter and the hunted, a fact that defines many of their behavioral characteristics and needs. Like most members of the weasel family, martens are bold, voracious predators, capable of killing animals twice their size. They typically kill smaller prey by biting with sharp canines at the junction of the neck and skull or, with larger prey like snowshoe hares, by severing the large artery in the throat.

Although martens occupy coniferous forests year-round, their food habits and habitat use change with the seasons. During the snow-free months, the forest is awash with food—small mammals, birds, insects, berries, bird eggs, amphibians, and green vegetation are abundant. The winter months, on the other hand, present a greater challenge; most songbirds migrate south, and insects, berries, and grasses are no longer available. Martens make the transition from summer to winter by becoming much more specialized, preying primarily on voles and mice. In winter, the numbers and availability of these small mammals become critical to marten survival.

Martens are well adapted to living and hunting where snow blankets the ground for over half the year. Their furred feet are slightly oversized and their weight is well distributed so that even the softest snow poses little obstacle to travel. Most of their hunting, however, takes place beneath the snow surface. They gain access through openings in the snow associated with deadfall (fallen trees and branches), logging slash, or large boulders. Martens are highly dependent on these avenues and the features that create them, including a forest canopy that reduces snow accumulation.

Although martens utilize all the major forest types in southwestern Montana (Douglas-fir, spruce/subalpine fir, lodgepole pine, and whitebark pine), they rely on specific forest types for much of their hunting. Foraging sites tend to be dominated by spruce and subalpine fir—moist sites characterized by large-diameter deadfall and lush ground cover that supports abundant mouse and vole populations.

Martens breed in July or August, but the fertilized eggs do not fasten to the wall of the uterus until midwinter (a phenomenon known as delayed implantation). They give birth in April to two to five young, each weighing about an ounce. The young martens are nearly full-grown at about three months.

The Southwest Montana Pine Marten Project

The U.S. Forest Service and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FW&P) are the two principal agencies responsible for managing martens in southwestern Montana. The Forest Service manages the vast majority of marten habitat and considers the marten an old-growth forest "indicator" species, or a species whose presence is indicative of a healthy old-growth environment. FW&P manages marten populations through regulation of harvest. In 1989 these agencies combined forces with Montana State University to create the Southwest Montana Pine Marten Project, a three-year study designed to assist resource managers in perpetuating marten populations.

During the study, researchers Quentin Kujala, Ken Coffin, and I live-trapped and radio-collared more than 50 pine martens. In turn, each of us spent one year in the field following these tagged animals—monitoring their movements and behavior, documenting their food habits, and evaluating their habitat use. Over the course of the study we estimated the relative density of marten populations through the use of

Marten Distribution in Montana

MIKE LOGAN

Red squirrel

MIKE LOGAN

Snowshoe hare

JAN L. WASSINK

Meadow vole

Voracious predators, martens are capable of killing animals, like snowshoe hares, that are twice their size. Perhaps because they are adept tree climbers, martens have long been thought to prey heavily on red squirrels; however, recent studies show that mice and voles provide the staple of the marten's diet in winter.

"track" transects. We ran these transects on snowmobiles or snowshoes one to two days after a fresh snowfall wiped out old marten tracks.

Track surveys are an integral part of furbearer management because they provide a reliable means of censusing animal abundance and distribution. On a statewide basis, FW&P biologists have established transects over hundreds of miles of forested habitats, using them to census marten, wolverine, fisher, lynx, bobcat, and mountain lion, and prey species like snowshoe hare, cottontail, and red squirrel.

Perhaps because martens are expert tree climbers, it has long been believed that they prey heavily on red squirrels during winter. Although we found that martens do indeed eat red squirrels, voles and mice are clearly the winter staple of the marten's diet in southwestern Montana. Food habit studies conducted since 1988 at the FW&P research facility in Bozeman indicate voles and mice make up about two-thirds of the marten's winter diet.

Not unexpectedly, marten populations fluctuate widely due to periodic failures in prey survival and reproduction. Judging by our poor success in live-trapping study animals during the winter of 1988-1989 and the low harvest by fur trappers the next fall and winter, such a prey-induced crash probably occurred across southwestern Montana during this period. The results from track surveys in subsequent years, however, suggested that marten numbers can rebound quickly when prey populations turn upward.

Although martens are fairly common forest occupants, they are not easily observed. Like domestic house cats, they sleep much of the day. Even with the aid of radiotelemetry we saw our study animals only infrequently. Occasionally during warm weather we spotted martens sleeping in birds' nests high up in trees. More typically they seek out dens in dead snags, hollow logs, or under tree roots that protect them from the elements and predators like great-horned owls, goshawks, coyotes, fishers, lynx, and mountain lions. Martens don't hibernate in the strict sense, but during extremely cold weather they may slightly depress their metabolism and sleep for several days at a time.

DAN & CINDY HARTMAN

Martens are well adapted to a climate where snow blankets the ground much of the year. Their furred feet are oversized and their weight well distributed so that even the softest snow poses little obstacle to travel.

Although the marten is generally considered a somewhat sedentary species (many studies report a maximum home range of about one square mile), the martens in our study areas proved to be surprisingly mobile. A male marten we ear-tagged in the Big Hole drainage in 1989 was harvested by a trapper three years later over 25 miles away. One of our radio-collared animals crossed ice-covered Hebgen Lake one night and returned the next, a round-trip distance of roughly nine miles. Movements of up to five miles a day were common, and our collared subjects ranged over areas of anywhere from 2 to 20 square miles. From a management perspective, this mobility is cause for optimism, as it assures that martens are continually testing and exploring the suitability of different habitats.

Effects of Clearcut Logging

Part of the reason for the marten's large home range size in southwestern Montana may be due to clearcut logging

Good marten habitat is a combination of many variables, including forest type, prey availability, stand maturity, and space.

practices. During winter, they rarely utilize large openings such as natural meadows or clearcuts. The lack of tree cover in such areas results in heavy snow accumulations that limit access to martens for hunting, resting, or escape from predators.

When they are too large or dominate the landscape, clearcuts force martens to concentrate in remaining forested areas, lowering the overall carrying capacity of the habitat, increasing territorial strife, and leaving them more vulnerable to trapping. Options being used by management agencies to reduce the impacts of clearcutting on martens and other forest-dwelling species include: (1) leaving more slash scattered throughout clearcuts, (2) limiting the size of clearcuts, (3) closing roads after logging, and (4) using alternative harvest techniques that leave standing live trees.

Although clearcut logging has undeniable impacts on wildlife, it is a controllable alternative to large, catastrophic wildfires that produce many of the same effects. The inherent danger of heavy accumulations of deadfall was dramatically brought home in the summer of 1988 when several million acres of forested land burned in the Intermountain West. These fires have reduced the carrying capacity of large acreages of marten habitat for many years to come. Burned-over areas can support martens, but generally they are not used for many of the same reasons that clearcuts and meadows aren't used.

Whether or not the primary habitats of pine martens in southwestern Montana are truly "old growth" is a difficult question to answer. Old-growth forests probably represent some of the best marten habitat we have, but they by no means represent the only forests that support martens. Martens live, indeed thrive, in many areas of southwestern Montana that have been roaded, commercially logged, and stripped of deadwood for firewood. While there is a popular perception that old-growth forests are static communities that can be preserved indefinitely, we know after the events of 1988 that today's old-growth can easily be tomorrow's smoking ruins. Good marten habitat is a combination of many variables, including forest type, prey availability, stand maturity, and space. Our study taught us that, at least in southwestern Montana, martens possess a degree of adaptability that goes well beyond their customary classification as an old-growth-dependent species.

Effects of Fur Harvest

Marten trapping, indeed all fur harvesting, is in the midst of change. Such change isn't new, as many of the same price woes and fashion changes that brought down the beaver trade in the mid-1800s are still at work today. Despite the decline in most major fur markets, trappers are still taking to the field every year. Trapping has a long-standing tradition in Montana, and many trappers continue to ply their trade in the hope that stronger markets will return someday.

Martens are currently managed through a December-January trapping season. Their lustrous brown fur is utilized for complete coats, as lining, and as trim. Historically, the harvest level has varied with market value, marten population levels, and trapping pressure. During the 1980s, the marten harvest in southwestern Montana averaged about 450 per year. The lowest catch for this period was 220, when pelt prices were around $14 each, and the highest was 950 when prices jumped to about $36 each. The turnaround in pelt prices and harvest occurred in just two years—between 1982 and 1984—illustrating some of the problems that radical price fluctuations can create for resource managers. The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission responded in 1987 with a two-month reduction in the trapping season, which at the time ran from November through February. High pelt prices continued through the 1988 trapping season, but have since fallen to the $25 range. Predictably, marten harvest levels have also dropped, and are now below 200 per year.

Because harvest level is a concern with any furbearer, we studied the effects of trapping on marten populations. Where active trap lines existed in our study area, trapping was the greatest source of mortality. Each year of the study we tried to quantify the effects of harvest by live-trapping after the fur season had ended. Post-season efforts yielded results similar to pre-season capture rates, indicating that new martens moved into unoccupied territories almost immediately after they were vacated. Our results showed that trapping at current levels by no means produces voids where few martens exist. Because marten populations enter winter, or the time of least food abundance, at their highest levels of the year, mortality is inevitable. Spring marten populations tend to be in line with the lowered carrying capacity whether trapping is present or absent.

MONTANANS value martens as fur animals, for viewing and photography, and as indicators of forest health. In recent years we have learned a great deal about these secretive predators—about their habitat requirements and their ability to adapt to changing conditions. Long-held assumptions about marten biology will need to be evaluated as additional research results come forward. With sound cutting practices and furbearer management, the marten can continue to prosper in the forests of western Montana. ■

HUNTING IN MONTANA: Resolving the Conflicts

by CHASE T. HIBBARD
STATE REPRESENTATIVE, HELENA DISTRICT 46

I'm a landowner, a hunter and fisherman, and do some limited outfitting. I've lived out-of-state and had to ask permission to hunt and fish. Given these experiences, I'm proud of Montana's leading role in wildlife conservation. Our wildlife resource and the quality of hunting and fishing in this state is second to none.

Game populations in Montana have been on the increase in recent years due to successful management and conservation. Two-thirds of the state is in private ownership, and game numbers have grown to the point where landowners are frustrated with the level of crop depredation. In an effort to derive some compensation for damage to their resources and livelihood, an increasing number of ranchers are shunning public hunting as a tool to control game populations in favor of leasing hunting rights or other forms of outfitting.

Sportsmen and women, whose license and conservation dollars are largely behind the impetus to increase game numbers, advocate purchase of habitat to remove the burden from private landowners. They also advocate hunting as a way of keeping expanding game populations in check. Programs such as block management have been designed for the purpose of taking the "monkey" off the landowner's back in hopes that private land will remain open to public hunting. Nonetheless, game numbers continue to increase and the trend toward limiting free public hunting in favor of paid hunting on private lands continues. Many view this commercial activity as privatization of public game and as a threat to wildlife conservation and the long-term viability of our hunting heritage.

While the landowner-sportsman battle looms, the outfitting industry is struggling for a position on the playing field. Damned by many hunters, anglers, and conservationists as the agent of privatizing a public resource, outfitters' actions are frequently viewed as akin to immoral. While the industry provides a valuable service, it finds itself increasingly at odds with other wildlife interests.

These three special interest groups—landowners, sportsmen and women, and outfitters—each have a deep-rooted and keen interest in the resource, each from a slightly different perspective. Let's examine for a moment why this interest and attachment to the resource exists. For the sportsman or conservationist, it's generally hunting and aesthetics; for the outfitter it's usually economics; and for the landowner it's self-preservation plus all of the above. The feelings, beliefs, and motivations are deeply rooted and strongly held, almost like religion or politics.

Montana's rich and long wildlife tradition and heritage is the common thread connecting these three interests. My quality of life as a rancher would be diminished if there were no longer abundant game and if I did not have the opportunity to interact with elk and deer and occasionally catch a cutthroat. Similarly, sportspersons and outfitters share an appreciation for game, the wildness it represents, and the opportunity to interact with it.

The rich hunting and wildlife traditions that are part of the fabric of Montana are under siege nationally. Michael Hayden, a former Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks, predicted last summer that sport hunting as we now know it may not exist by 2050. Several factors are at work that may contribute to its demise, including demographics, the image of hunting portrayed in the mass media, and the animal rights movement.

If one looks at the demographics of the hunting public compared with the demographics of society as a whole, there are some striking differences. Active hunters make up less than 10% of the population. Less than 2% are women. Of all active hunters, 96% are white and 53% live in rural areas. Contrast these statistics with the population as a whole: 51% female, 25% minority, and 75% urban.

Most members of the general public do not have an opinion about whether hunting is right or wrong, moral or immoral. This usually means they are vulnerable to opinion leaders and shapers, such as the national media. This is alarming considering how sport hunting is often portrayed on network television. Remember a few years ago, when NBC covered the bison hunt at Gardiner, reporting that 3,000 hunters had applied for the privilege of shooting buffalo as they left Yellowstone National Park? It didn't look like sport. It looked like slaughter. The NBC cameras captured a hunter shooting a buffalo with a .30-06 rifle. After being shot once, the bison just stood there looking at the shooter. It was shot again with the same result, and finally shot a third time before it fell. This does not play well with undecided Americans who are to a large degree influenced by how the press portrays an event.

In addition, hunting is losing ground on other fronts. In 1975, 20.6 million hunters nationwide bought licenses. By 1992 license sales had decreased 23% to 15.8 million. While hunting is losing popularity nationally, organizations opposed to hunting are growing rapidly. Animal welfare organizations are among the fastest growing special interest groups in the nation. Most of them run the gamut from reformist to radical but generally fall into one of three categories: welfarist, pragmatist, and fundamentalist. The

Cooperation among landowners, sportsmen, and outfitters is the key to preserving Montana's hunting heritage.

welfarists tend to be the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) and the Humane Society , which try to minimize animal suffering through legislation and education. The pragmatists believe that some species deserve more consideration than others. These groups include the Fund for Animals and the Friends of Animals. The fundamentalists demand an immediate end to exploitation of all animals and often resort to extreme tactics to accomplish their goals. Some of the more visible fundamentalist groups include PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and ALF (Animal Liberation Front).

While the number of hunters is declining, the number of animal rights activists is growing and the curves are about to cross. The elimination of hunting is about fourth on their list behind: (1) The use of animals for medical and consumer research; (2) the use of furbearing animals in the fashion and clothing industries; and (3) the use of farm animals in the food industry.

In Montana, the groups that care most about the resource and have the largest stake in that resource are the same groups who are beating up one another. While these groups—landowners, sportsmen, and outfitters—wage civil war, larger national anti-hunting and anti-wildlife management trends are gaining momentum.

The 53rd session of the Montana Legislature was a disaster for wildlife, conservation, hunting, and landowner-sportsman issues. Each group—sportsmen, landowners, and outfitters—came to the table with self-serving agendas and little or no respect for the views of the other stakeholders in the resource. The issues included such diverse proposals as moratoriums on game farms and outfitter licenses, eliminating any net gain of wildlife habitat by the state, totally revising the method of allocating out-of-state licenses, grants to landowners for allowing hunting access, and increasing the outfitter set-aside for deer tags. Most of the legislative proposals were viewed as extremist by the other groups or, as one wildlife lobbyist contended, "pie-in-your-face."

None of these extreme bills passed the legislature. The only controversial bill that passed was Representative Ream's HB 338, a compromise on game farms that was negotiated in the interim by the Departments and Commissions of Fish, Wildlife & Parks and Livestock, game farmers, and sportsmen. If anything came of the session it was this: The wedge between these groups was driven deeper, the level of animosity and tension increased, and relations among landowners, sportsmen, and outfitters deteriorated to a new low.

Each session that fails to accomplish anything constructive and that contributes to the divisiveness surrounding wildlife issues accelerates the demise of sport hunting as we know it. While we fight among ourselves, larger national trends gain momentum, further threatening our wildlife and hunting heritage.

In an attempt to begin healing this divisiveness, the legislature passed House Joint Resolution 24, which called for creation of a Private Land/Public Wildlife Advisory Council. The overall purpose of the council is to recognize the commonality that exists among these constituencies. Made up of members from the sporting community, landowners, outfitters, and the public, the council is charged with addressing common goals that will mutually benefit all parties as well as the state's wildlife resources.

The council's stated purpose is to define common goals including but not limited to:

- •Achieving optimum hunter access.
- •Protecting wildlife habitat.
- •Minimizing impacts on and inconvenience to landowners.
- •Encouraging the continuance of a viable outfitting industry.
- •Providing additional tangible benefits to landowners who allow hunter access.

The council, comprised of 14 citizen members and three ex-officio members representing a variety of interests, has been appointed by Governor Racicot and is chaired by Nina Baucus, a landowner from Wolf Creek (see sidebar).

The group is to receive administrative assistance from the Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks and is to report its solutions to the 1995 legislature through the department and the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission. The resolution states that legislation introduced should reflect the mutual interests of landowners, outfitters, and the sporting community.

One of the unique features of this effort is that the resolution calls for the creation of local and regional groups to address problems at the local level and pass on their recommended solutions to the statewide group. One of the failures of the legislative process is that laws passed are often general in nature and don't reflect local uniqueness or peculiarities. By establishing groups at the local level, comprised of people who live with the problems on a daily basis, the process will become decentralized.

There are a few examples around the state of local groups that have taken the initiative to involve all parties with an interest in an issue in an attempt to shape their own destiny. In the case of the Private Land/Public Wildlife Advisory Council, I envision representatives of the Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, landowners, public land managers, sportsmen and women, and local businessmen all sitting around the table defining common goals.

Montanans desperately need to lay down their sabers and begin working together to solve wildlife issues. It is my hope that the new council will not be just another landowner-sportsman group where no one is willing to look beyond his or her own prejudices. It is unique in its mission and in its decentralized structure. Montana's hunting heritage is hanging in the balance. ■

Private Land/Public Wildlife Advisory Council Members

Nina Baucus, Helena, Chair; Steve Christensen, Corvallis; Jamie Connell, Bureau of Land Management, Malta (ex-officio member); Ken Coulter, Brusett; David "Skip" Erickson, Glasgow; Charles Floyd, Havre; Kelly Flynn, Townsend; Dave Garber, Gallatin National Forest, Bozeman (ex-officio member); Kathy Hadley, Deer Lodge; Jeff Hagener, Dept. of State Lands, Helena (ex-officio member); Senator John Hertel, Moore; Verle Rademacher, White Sulphur Springs; Mary Sexton, Choteau; Russ Smith, Philipsburg; Representative Emily Swanson, Bozeman; Art Swetye, Bozeman; Art Vail, Kalispell.

A Husband, a Hunter, and Vice-Versa

by CHRIS DAHL, illustrations by DAVE MCGEE

AT THE TIME, I was a starving college student trying to scrape by with a wife and a new baby. I've since graduated from college to become a starving taxpayer trying to scrape by, but that's another story. It had been six years since I had hunted elk. Two falls were spent overseas, the others spent playing college football. Now, finally, an October on the refrigerator calendar would have the general elk season marked "DO NOT DISTURB."

To say I was happy about this hunt would be like saying the Philistine

giant Goliath was happy to see the shepherd boy David come to the battlefield. It went beyond happy. This hunt was planned out to the final detail. My Dad would call and tell me that we had permission to hunt a private ranch, or that he had seen dozens of elk on a scouting trip, or to tell me about a new handload he was trying. We decided who would ride which horse. This was July, before preparations got serious.

Even though work, school, and bills saddled me with a big load, I patiently counted the days until "E-Day." I must have killed 200 bulls in the visions of six-points that danced in my head. I rewrote the Boone and Crockett book in one semester during a technical writing class. It was great therapy.

However, one need only read the Bible to find out what became of Goliath's joy at seeing the shepherd boy David. Indeed, some of life's greatest miseries come from small and unexpected sources. One day, out of the blue, my wife's sister called and announced that she was getting married in California during the exact days of the long-awaited elk hunt.

This was very bad news. Well, I'd have to do some tricky planning and figure out a way to get Kim to California and back without spending all of the $40.00 I had saved for the elk hunt. A few days later it finally looked like everything was going to work out, but I was still nervous about actually telling Kim my plan to skip on the wedding and go hunting.

It was many times harder to muster the courage to deliver this speech than it was to give the one that got us married in the first place. I worried over it, chewed on it, rolled it around, swallowed it down, and burped it up. The initial attempt didn't go over very well, but Kim never verbally said she'd leave me if I abandoned her sister's wedding to go hunting.

I was caught smack between two of the things I love most in life, my wife and elk hunting. Now, I love elk hunting just as much as the next bugle-toting fanatic, but I really do love my wife much more. If I really had to make a choice, I would give up elk hunting for her in a heartbeat. I love to hunt, but I wouldn't risk her love for it.

The love of my sister-in-law is an entirely different story. I was willing to risk the love of my sister-in-law, the love of my family-in-law, and the love of everyone in the whole state of California to get to go elk hunting.

As the time drew near, I got the gut feeling that perhaps it just wasn't meant to be. Worse, I figured that Kim's other sister and two younger brothers would probably follow suit and ruin at least three more seasons in the future. Every relative I had would probably be born, get married, and die right during elk season. I figured I'd just have to start hunting rabbits.

Kim was very sympathetic, but simply didn't understand what the big deal was. She didn't come from a hunting family. Getting up at 4:00 a.m. and hiking uphill all day to maybe get a shot at something that might come by seemed quite pale in comparison to getting all fancied up for a killer wedding party, especially when you have a new baby to show off. To prove what a great person she is, Kim told me I'd just have to decide what to do all by myself. I decide the action, she decides the consequences. I wasn't very comforted.

Well, the fateful day came as all fateful days do. I vacillated to the very end, but finally did the only thing a man who is both an elk hunter and a husband could do under the circumstances.

Luckily, we're still happily married. Even luckier, I brought home lots of elk venison, but to this day it's not a good idea to mention it. ■

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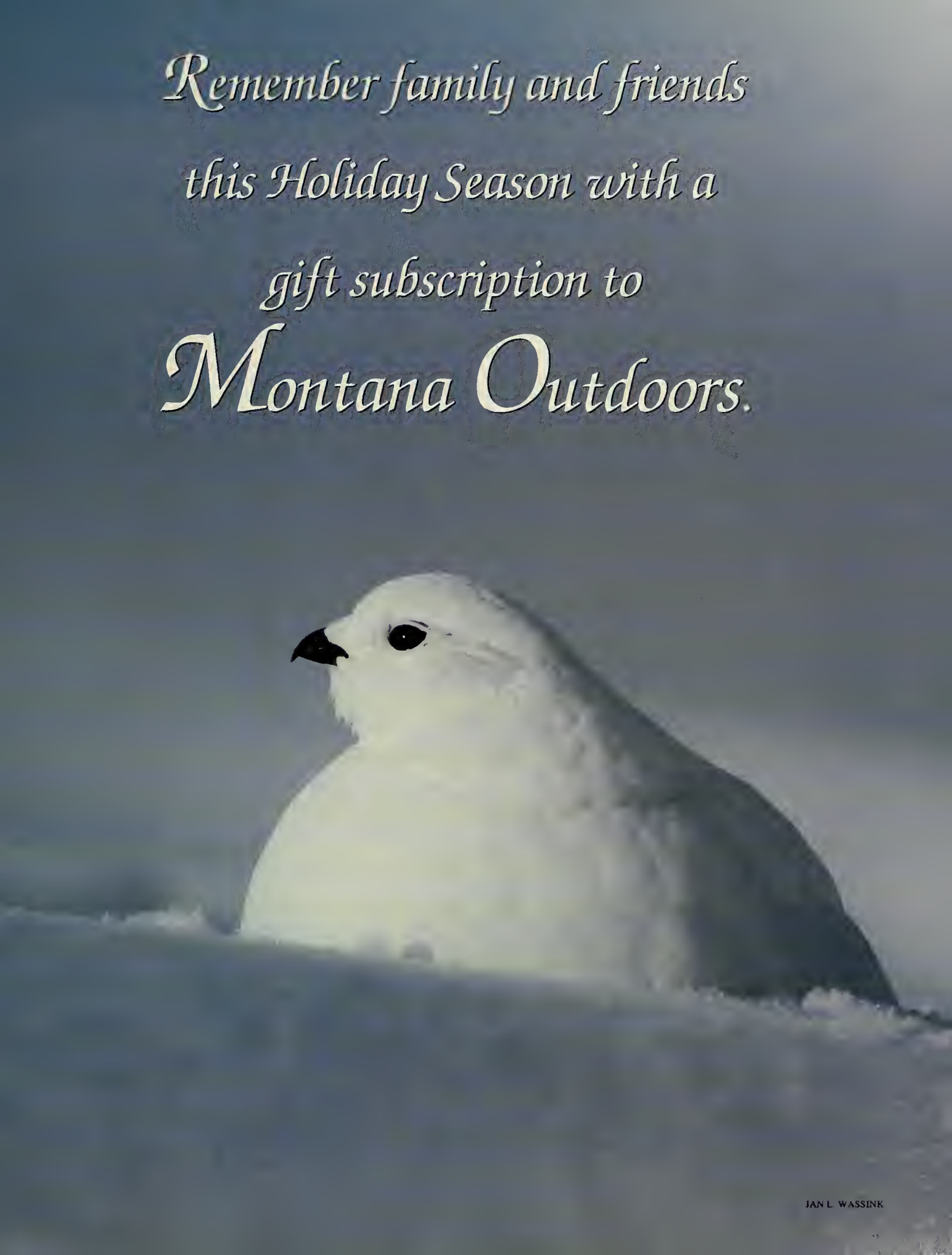

JAN L. WASSINK